

Chancellor's Community Forum
5 Year Plan
November 12, 2008
Patterson ES
6:30-8:00PM
Jim Sandman

The notes below reflect our effort to summarize the comments, questions and concerns expressed at each meeting. They are not recorded verbatim and should not be considered direct quotations.

Overview: Many of the participants felt that they did not have adequate time to comment on the 5-year plan because they were just receiving the information. Overwhelmingly, the participants felt that the points that were discussed were far too general and does not address the immediate needs of kids and teachers. There were a number of rhetorical questions asked and because the discussion ran over time, no one requested any specific follow-up because they were in a rush to exit.

Keywords: after-school programs, peer pressure, community based organizations (CBO), 5 Year Plan, DC BAS, DC CAS, content standard, special education services, wrap around services, STEM, K-8 Model, signature schools, discipline, restructuring, Parent Resource Centers, budgeting plans, NCLB, MEP

Presenter/Moderator: Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management;
Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

Panelists: Jim Sandman, DCPS General Counsel;
Jesus Aguirre, Director of School Operations

Other DCPS Staff: Gerren Price, Chancellor's Representative, Critical Response Team

Codes

AS = Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management

MR = Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

JS = Jim Sandman, DCPS General Counsel

JA = Jesus Aguirre, Director of School Operations

GP = Gerren Price, Chancellor's Representative, Critical Response Team

Notes:

JS: Opened up the discussion by having each person in the room introduce themselves. Posed question #1 on the blue sheet.

CM: Working at a high school has shown me that fundamental principles of what it means to be a good student are lacking with many students (such as turning in

homework in time and filling out assignments completely). I believe there is not enough being done early on to instill these basic values.

MR: *What are some of the challenges you have faced so far?*

CM: A large number of students are participating in **after-school programs**, but most students see it more as “homework help” as opposed to tutoring. I feel students do not understand that they can come to get assistance with understanding key concepts, not just help with one specific assignment.

MR: It sounds like we need to ensure that we are engaging students with their education from a younger age to ensure that they are engaged with what they are learning when they are older.

CM: This is a major issue that needs to be addressed.

CM: There is a lot of **peer pressure** coming directly from the students. Even when students are actively engaged, the students nearby who don’t get it often tease and bother the students who are on point. One strategy that I have been trying to implement is to separate students who are excelling. Sometimes we need to separate the students who want to learn to help them advance. So far, the **after-school program** at Patterson is going extremely well. There was an event last weekend to make reading more interactive. Coordinating the **after-school programming** is a lot of work, but it’s a rewarding job. I am happy to see that the students have structure and are learning and appreciate the flexibility to do all kinds of things. I can see students are definitely learning and goals are being achieved.

CM: I especially like the goal from the 5-year plan that focuses on engaging the community. I like the idea of centralizing and restructuring the way **after-school programming** is managed. It would be great to put this same concept into place during the regular school day as well. I have spoken to a number of principals who have stated that it is difficult to effectively partner with the many non-profits and **community-based organizations (CBOs)** trying to make an impact during the daytime because there is no central point of contact in the schools during the day. Specifically, the principals at Ballou and Woodson have both said they like to work some **CBOs**, but do not have the time and/or capacity to work with them.

CM: The **CBOs** assigned to Patterson have been wonderful so far and their presence has made a big difference. Particularly, one organization called Family Life Community Center has done great work. On Saturday, kids and families will participate in the Fannie Mae Help-the-Homeless walk. There is a bus picking families up and they will be served breakfast and lunch.

JS: *Are there any additional comments or thoughts regarding the five year-plan?*

CM: *When were these materials distributed? Is this the first time they have been distributed to the people in attendance?*

JS: The information has been posted on the website for a little over a week, but this is likely the first time the materials were distributed in hard copy to the people in attendance.

CM: There should be more time given to community members before the actual meeting to make sure that the community can synthesize the information prior to asking them for feedback. If the Chancellor's Office truly wants a thoughtful discussion, then it needs to give people adequate time to review the information so that they can contribute.

CM: *What happens to the input that is coming in?*

JS: All notes will be collected and included on the website. The input will be given to the Chancellor and possibly incorporated into the plans.

CM: *Is everything going to be considered? Will plans actually change?* There is not enough time given to review the documents and provide meaningful feedback.

GP: If you would prefer to take information home with you and get more time to digest, you can also leave your feedback on the DCPS website. This feedback will be collected and considered as well.

CM: *Will there be another forum?* Instead of using the website, I would like to provide feedback in person at the next forum. *What is being done to make sure that the people who will attend the next meeting will have time to see these documents?*

CM: There should be a discussion that takes place regarding this information and a dialogue before having the forum (perhaps first with teachers, then with parents, then with the entire community).

CM: My school has a very active parent community, but even my school's parents are not aware of these forums. The Chancellor's Office needs to do a better job to get more people involved.

CM: I have been teaching at Patterson for a while and feel like we have been through this before and are doing things backward. Far too often, things are implemented and then we try to go back and fix things after they have failed. As an elementary school teacher, a **5 Year Plan** is not useful because you lose children during the interim. I have a problem with the document because it starts with a line that says the general belief is that we are doing a disservice to our children. This is a slap in the face. As an early childhood educator, nothing in this

document addresses early childhood at all. We are sitting in classrooms in this building based on the plan to close local schools that have made Patterson out of compliance because it is overcrowded. It is a beautiful school right now because there are no kids trying to get from point A to point B. During the day, it is crowded and there are no aides in the classroom. Kindergarten classes have 29 students with no aides. The square footage being counted is incorrect, so there are too many students and not enough space. There is a problem when we call these things a failure. It is not enough to provide concerns and feedback on the website. You cannot simply look at the numbers of children projected to enroll in order to make decisions. You cannot teach regardless of where a student comes from if you do not have the resources needed to teach these children. If you put 29 kids together and there are supposed to be 20, then it is not enough to say just teach those students.

CM: As a teacher at Patterson, we are looking at students with severe challenges and are expected to make AYP. The 5th grade teacher has 44 students in her class. She has in her class students who realistically should have never left 1st grade. But, they get promoted because now we cannot retain them until 3rd grade. She gets numerous students who cannot or look at the **DC BAS** or **DC CAS** and say that they are unable to do it. Last year, several students put their heads down and cried during testing. Teachers are expected to help students meet AYP and this gets attached to their rating. I can help a child grow a grade level, but getting them up two or three grade levels is not impossible, but very difficult when you have an overcrowded classroom. Children are passed from grade to grade and are then asked to read a test and perform well.

JS: Sounds like there are 3 recommendations or suggestions for improvement: 1. Provide the ability to retain students at all grade levels; 2. Ensure that adequate resources are available in all classrooms; 3. Effectively address the issues around classroom size.

CM: *Teachers, has this issue of aides and enrollment been addressed thus far?*

CM: No, but this needs to be talked about along with NCLB. You can't train someone to be an early childhood teacher. You need to be able to nurture these students. Most of the teachers at Patterson live in this community. Many of the aides who were working here last year are now gone because they could not pass the test, but had been in classrooms for almost 20 years. Many of them were more capable and qualified than some of the classroom teachers being brought in. Many teachers are not actually effective. We need to look at how aides are retained and how they are hired. Teachers need to be able to say something to the aides when they don't work well. Many documents have been surfacing regarding increasing teacher compensation. I didn't choose to be a teacher because she wanted to get rich. It's not about the money. The test doesn't speak to her qualifications. As an early childhood educator, I don't need

to know algebra, but need to be able to teach a student their colors. Tests should not be the standard.

CM: *Does the Chancellor's Office have someone on staff who is the point person for community involvement and engaging people?*

There should be a separate meeting with the community first and then teachers should be pulled into the discussion as well. I am upset that the opportunity to be at the table with the Chancellor and have a thoughtful discussion has been wasted because there are really no facts to address. I expected to talk about something more specific. There are lots of good points. I see the goals but do not see the objectives. I am concerned about the Hart issue. There are some very basic things that need to be taken care of in the school. Snatching principals and teachers in and out causes me to question the evaluation of these individuals and it also gives kids the message that if they act up then their principal and teacher will be removed. I am really concerned because I have been in Washington for 30 years and the plans always sound beautiful, but I want to know how we are going to make this work.

What will we know at the end of one year? What are the criteria that I can have to show that this plan is working? What are missing are the criteria?

We need concrete goals, realistic objectives, and then take this plan and flesh it out. If we need to create a listserv and/or do anything else, then I will work with central office to make it happen.

CM: Something that is missing from the **5 Year Plan** and **MEP** are the fate of **restructuring schools**. It is not mentioned how we address the schools that are being restructured and what we expect to gain out of those schools and what policies will support those schools over 5 years. Also, there is no **budgeting plan**. Anacostia has a science lab but there are no lab materials to make it work. All we are doing is preparing kids to take tests. *What policies do we have to support what is here and how can we measure what goes into the five year plan? What milestones? How do we know what to do if the five year plan doesn't work?*

CM: In looking at part #2 – Great People. It says high performing employees are not rewarded and low performers are not facing any consequences. What is missing is the part that explains how we are going to do this and what will be done to ensure this. Right now, none of these things are in place. Lots of things have been said, but there is absolutely nothing saying that there will be help and support for teachers. I love teaching and am not in it for the money. I stay everyday until 6PM and a little more money doesn't make me stay any longer. I stay because I want to be ready for my children. I do this everyday, but it is not about the money. Teaching comes from the heart and it is something that people are born to do. The plan is missing what will be provided to teachers.

CM: *What will be done to get parents in the door?* We don't see an effective plan for getting parents involved. We have tried all kinds of things, but parents are not participating. There are some great parents at Patterson, but there are a number from the PR Harris boundaries who will not travel to come in and rely only on information from their children. There are some parents who are afraid to come to school (perhaps because of their own negative experiences). One parent told me she doesn't like coming into the school. We need to figure out how to engage those kinds of parents in their children's education. When we were in school, our parents were there. This is no longer the case with all parents. The plan needs to discuss how we will work towards instilling these kinds of values in our parents.

JS: *Have you seen or implemented any strategies that have worked? Any suggestions for how we can do a better job?*

CM: This comes from the **wrap-around services** that were promised. The system needs to be aware of what is going on. The government requires parents to be getting their GED or to have a job. Parents are not allowed to be working in the schools. Before **NCLB**, parents could volunteer in school and eventually become an aide. Parents on TANF are unable to come into DCPS and work here. We lose a lot of parents' involvement that way.

The internet doesn't work in this building. The phone lines cut off at Patterson at 4:30PM. *Where is the warm and fuzzy and the welcoming?*

The "new" thematic units are a throwback to what has already been done in the past and did not work then. If things keep changing, we are not going to get anywhere. When we moved to PR Harris, there were 4 coach buses and 60 children. We were still paying for all of these buses for 60 children. Now there is a larger area of children coming. Another problem is that we don't get to select our children. If parents have to pay for bus tokens to get their child to their neighborhood school and there is a charter school that is closer, then they are sending their child there. We are not going to have the quality that other places have because anyone can come into these schools. Many kids use fake addresses and get into these schools as well. Charter schools can do things when kids come in with the wrong uniform. We can't do anything about it. What we need to do is let every DC public school pick and choose who is going to attend the school. It is imperative that we look at who our customers are. There are a lot of children who are emotionally disturbed. When we were in school, there were impairments, but we have kids with severe emotional issues. It's like they were in a war. Students are angry. Some come to school at 7am or earlier because they need breakfast. It is not enough to say everyone gets free breakfast. Some kids travel more than a mile and a half to get here.

CM: A lot of the after-care students are actually riding a bus in the afternoon. It is extremely dangerous for a student to be at the bus stop when it is dark out. I will try to find a van or something to take students home. Patterson has always been

a high-achieving school. When I come in the morning, the kids are needy and out of control.

CM: This is reflected of our neighborhoods.

CM: This bothers and angers many teachers.

CM: It really hurts when we are doing all that we can and then someone from downtown comes in and walks around the building and says there is not enough “rigor.” We don’t have time for “rigor” because sometimes students need nurturing. They need “come here, baby.” We are here to love these babies regardless of who they are. We don’t need anybody coming in here to observe what they do. We have new teachers, veteran teachers, teachers who came in 3 or 4 weeks into the year, we have teachers who have more children than ever before. There is a 5th grade class that has 44 students in a classroom. I can honestly say I am a good teacher. I would still be a good teacher even if no one paid me. My heart is here for these children. Don’t keep saying that it’s about compensation.

CM: There are some people who are going to teach no matter what, but increasing pay might bring in potentially great teachers who might not have been able to consider it otherwise. I don’t think it is a bad thing to open up the profession for people who may have different circumstances that would not have made them consider teaching because of its traditionally low pay.

CM: I understand that, but if the reason someone wants to come into teaching is to pay off loans, then they shouldn’t be doing this.

CM: Some people may have a heart to teach but think that they cannot afford it. This isn’t such a bad idea.

CM: I don’t like the re-tooling idea because it gives more money to people who are choosing to come into schools now. Why is \$5,000 going to people who switch careers? Also, it is not fair to judge a teacher solely on test scores because the new teacher suffers because a teacher before was not paying attention.

CM: We need to review boundaries. I have observed many Maryland tags in the morning dropping kids off in the morning. We need to do a better job of supporting the **Parent Resource Centers**. I heard there is one at McGogney and it has a \$1M budget. *Is this going to continue? How far have they moved to develop the centers?*

We need to effectively use the structures that we have in place to get the information out. The law says that we have to use the ANCs, but these meetings often don’t have educational information being discussed. We need to make

better use of these. We need to understand that there are different perspectives. There is a teacher perspective. There is a parent perspective. The community and our partnerships have a different perspective as well. We also need to examine the effectiveness of the **K-8 model**. All of the **K-8 schools** are crowded. This city was built on neighborhood schools, but when you have a huge boundary parents are not going to come. The **restructuring plan** is not a one-size fits all model. **Signature schools** work. We have Anne Beers with the **STEM** program and the same with Stanton.

What about the schools not on the edge of the ward? There is nothing on this end of the ward to engage students with this kind of perspective. Schools should be **signature schools** that are mostly program driven. Parents send their kids to other schools because of the violence, not so much the instruction. There are major **discipline** issues in many of our schools. This is the case with Hart. The kids are not afraid, teachers are afraid. *How do we plan to make our schools safer?* We don't need to throw more police officers in there, but we need to throw programs in there that are different from what is currently being offered.

AS: We appreciate the feedback and are glad to hear it. If folks need to go, then they can definitely do that. There are some things that we can do to immediately provide answers and results. In the performance plan that was given, there are defined metrics in there regarding how we can see if we have made any results. Also, there are benchmarks and milestones listed. This is how we know what happens this year and after. We can send this to people if they request it. Regarding teacher pay issues, we all agree that teachers don't go into it for the money. But, we also think that really good teachers deserve to be paid really well because you work hard and are doing right by your students. We think excellent teachers deserve to be rewarded and deserve the resources that they need. We are not ashamed to say that excellent teachers should be rewarded.

CM: Across the board, there are a "gazillion" different programs in Ward 8 that promise results. I have lived here for just a few years. Everyone has an idea, but one of the reasons that there is hesitancy is that it requires proactive engagement with the community. There are lots of assumptions about who lives in Ward 8. There is a lot that can be tapped into, but people don't benefit from this. We have to be transparent. Everyone has been bitten. We have all seen the non-profits and the programs and the only people who benefit are the ones who conceptualize. This time, there has to be some effort in terms of communicating. The school system should be tapping into the resources that are out there. We have to figure out ways to pull in the community and think about the kinds of support that is needed. There needs to be transparent evaluative criteria. I want to know in the end whether or not it works. It's not enough to say we want great people and compelling schools.

CM: *If you haven't given teachers the supplies and tools that are needed, then how does this plan address that? What happens in that year during which people*

are waiting? Each year we don't give kids what they need we are losing one year of their lives. It is not just teachers you are hurting, but you are taxing the children's lives.

CM: It is nice to be paid, but to see a student get on an updated computer would be better. When contacting someone downtown about their inability to use the interactive TV channel at Patterson, I was told downtown forgot to install the right equipment. Patterson does not have the money to get this up and running. The school budget says that they now have the same money and yet more students. They aren't able to get the interactive TV needed to help enhance the educational experience for their kids. More than half of the E-mac computers do not work. We are told they have to figure things out on their own, but then the tech budget is used to pay for another teacher. Many plans don't account for the cost of the upkeep of the equipment that is given. In Ward 8, teachers feel that they are slighted. I give a lot of her own personal money and resources, but this isn't matched by the central office.

CM: It's not that teachers deserve to be paid more. It is that the way that the plan for paying teachers is coming about. At the beginning of the school year, at the convention center, 6 schools received money for meeting AYP. *What was the thinking behind the incentive rewards?*

If the Chancellor's group is willing to reward the custodian for something they were not even involved in, it sends the message that I need to teach not only my class, but it also means that I need to look out for other teachers' students and classrooms. Pre-K does not test. This means I am not rewarded for the quality of work that I give to get students ready for the next grade level. If I can see that some kids really need **special education services**, I have to do whatever I can do with them instead of referring them. I shouldn't have to do this. It is not fair because it is painted as a competition. Kids missed out on field trips because they were too expensive. There is nothing in the plan for the needs of early childhood. The plan needs to be grade level friendly. We need to look at smaller schools. PR Harris closed because people were not using the space. PR Harris didn't work out because it was a zoo. We need to go back to when we were in school. I learned how to play an instrument in 5th grade. Every junior high school had a band and a swim team. There was something for every child with any desire. We are building a new Woodson now and spending \$90M. The building will be in disrepair in five years. Patterson will be in the same state in five years. I feel that early childhood **content standards** are the weakest of all. There are 28 students in the classroom and the standards say the kids must be able to count to 5 by the end of the school year.

What is the cost of the coaches being promised? Will coaches be coaching teachers who don't need to be in the system? Who is responsible for principal selection?

Back in the day, hirings relied heavily on the community because the community knows what a good fit is in that particular community. We need to think about that when we schedule these community meetings. We need to determine when the best time to have these meetings is. Community centers would be the better place to hold these kinds of events.

CM: Please make sure the parents have some accountability for something. Students should not be allowed to tear up the building without there being any recourse.